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NEWS
FROM YOUR MUSEUM
THE ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

Know your Museum better

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QUEEN ELIZABETH'S NEW YEAR STOCKINGS

A pair of nylon stockings sent to Princess Elizabeth as a wedding gift, by seventeen-year-old Betty White of Winnipeg, plus the kindly co-operation of a newspaper in her home city, resulted in a 'plane trip to London so that Betty might see the wedding procession with all its pomp and circumstance. And all Canada rejoiced with her. This incident recalls another gift of stockings to a royal Elizabeth—the queen who reigned in Shakespeare's day. In the England of that age it was New Year's Day, and not Christmas, when friends exchanged gifts, and historical records show that the gifts were often of a lavish nature. This custom, brought to Britain by the Romans, became general over Europe. Queen Elizabeth's gifts were counted by the hundreds, but one of them on a certain New Year's morning, gave her a special thrill. An admiring subject sent her a pair of black knitted silk stockings. They delighted her so much that a vow was made on the instant that never again would she wear her customary cloth hose. Nor did she! Elizabethan days and ways have never lost their magic and appeal. Every day at the Royal Ontario Museum, visitors linger to admire the authentic Elizabethan room with its quaint furnishings. They inspect the wool-embroidered linen curtains, the hats, shoes and velvets among other household accessories in the Golden Age of England. And a smile always comes when the warming-pans for insertion between chilly linen sheets, are examined. There's a harpsichord in the Elizabethan exhibit, too, the forerunner of the moder piano. It was introduced late in Queen Elizabeth's reign.

100 PAUL KANE PAINTINGS HANG IN MUSEUM

Indians in their hundreds roamed the woods adjoining Toronto—then the village of Little York—when artist Paul Kane was a child there. He was fascinated as he watched them at work and play, or saw them fishing, or hunting wild fowl in the great marsh that fringed the Bay. This picturesque background of his boyhood was never forgotten. In 1845, following extensive travel in the United States and art study in Europe, chiefly in Italy, Paul Kane returned to Canada to depict Indian life on canvas. But Toronto had become a city in the meantime and Kane realized that the Indians were already vanishing and would soon be gone. He then embarked upon his journey to the western plains and the Pacific coast. Through forests on foot, over the waterways by canoe, across the prairie on horseback, the artist visited tribe after tribe, making sketches of valiant chiefs and buffalo hunters, of games and ceremonial dances; of the majestic mountain and coastal scenery that was their setting. These pictures of Indians and records of activities that had been carried on in the same primitive fashions down the centuries, would have been lost forever but for the artistry of Paul Kane, for the whole aboriginal scene was soon to be washed away by the tide of settlement and civilization flowing from the east. Just a century ago—in 1848—Kane returned to Toronto to complete his great collection of sketches in oils. One hundred of these paintings adorn walls in the Royal Ontario Museum.

CHINA'S NEW YEAR DEEPLY SIGNIFICANT

The longest, the gayest, the happiest, the noisiest of the "Great Festivals" of China is the New Year. In the Chinese Library at the Royal Ontario Museum we found fascinating ceremonies described, showing that this celebration means a great deal to the Chinese people. Socially, it signifies reunion. Morally it represents the idea of resurrection, the re-birth of the year. Materially it stands for rejuvenation both in the home and market-place. Personally and commercially, men turn over a new leaf, strive to pay off old debts in money and loyalty. Live fowls and prepared dishes are popular New Year gifts among the Chinese, but the polite person does not accept everything sent. He chooses a few things and returns the rest with a message that the gift is far too generous to be accepted in its entirety. The system has one great advantage: what is refused by one person may be passed on to another, and vice versa. Among the poorer people, a pair of new shoes is an appropriate and welcome gift.

AN EXCAVATION OF A HURON INDIAN OSSUARY

During the month of January, the Special Exhibition Gallery of the Royal Ontario Museum of Archaeology will display the results of an excavation conducted by the Museum in the summer of 1947, in Tiny Township, Simcoe county, where an Indian ossuary or bone-pit was partially explored.

It was the custom of the Hurons at the time of the arrival of the first Europeans to bring together the remains of all those who had died during the preceding eight or ten years and, holding an elaborate, week-long ceremony, to re-inter them in a large pit, burying them with many of the articles which the dead had used in this life and were believed to require in the life beyond the grave. Such ceremonies were held, as a rule, about every ten years, at which time, all villages within a radius of ten or twelve miles participated. The Hurons always referred to the event ts "The Feast of the Kettle," since the essential function was to bid farewell to the departed in a great, final feast.

The excavation of this particular ossuary has special significance, in that it is believed to be the one associated with the village called Ossossane by the Hurons, New Rochelle by the French and La Conception by the Jesuits. Both the Recollect and the Jesuit missionaries refer to this village in their accounts; and Brébeuf gives a long, detailed, eye-witness account of the "Feast of the Kettle" which occurred in 1636. All evidence so far produced indicates that this is the ossuary referred to by Brébeuf, but positive proof must await completion of the excavation.

This is the first time an undisturbed ossuary has been studied according to modern archaeological procedure. Skeletal material recovered will reveal the physical make-up and pathology of the Hurons; while the specimens buried with the bones reflect the customs of the time, and particularly mirror the effects of trade with the French. As this ossuary is estimated to be about fifteen years later in construction than that excavated by the Museum in 1946 at Cahiague, the changes shown in the European trade goods are interesting.